
News & Views

John
AHERN

State Representative • 6th District

6th District office:

320 W. Spofford
Spokane, WA 99205
(509) 568-3077

E-mail address:

ahern_jo@leg.wa.gov

Toll-free hotline:

(800) 562-6000
(800) 635-9993
(hearing impaired)

Internet:

[http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/
members/ahern.htm](http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/ahern.htm)

Committees:

- Criminal Justice and Corrections
(*ranking Republican member*)
- Finance
- Local Government and Housing



2004 SESSION REVIEW

Dear friends,

The 2004 Legislative session was a short, but important, one. Some of the bills we passed this year will give Washington a **better business climate**, which will mean more and higher-paying jobs for our state's families. We also passed legislation that will directly **help our kids**, including allowing charter schools and making changes to the WASL test.

On the other hand, we left Olympia this year with many important pieces of legislation still on the table, including **liability reform** – something we desperately need to keep doctors from leaving Washington. The Legislature must aggressively pursue those ideas in the 2005 session.

Now that I am back in the district, if you have any questions, want to talk about legislative issues, or need helping working with a state agency, please give me a call or stop by our district office. **Our door is always open.**

Sincerely,

John Ahern
State Representative

Inside:

- Session highlights
- The budget
- On the table for next year
- Just say, "No!" to bad legislation!
- Spokane projects funded
- A new primary election

Representative **JOHN AHERN**

2004 Legislative Session highlights



Wins for Kids

The Legislature passed two important education bills this year. After years of debate, Washington now becomes the 42nd state to allow **charter schools**. This is an important step in giving kids who attend a failing or closing school another chance at success. We also passed a bill that will provide more flexibility in the **Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test**. Schools must now allow for re-takes, require clear achievement standards, and help kids struggling to pass.

Another important win this year is a measure that will **impose tougher sentences for sex offenders who prey on children**. The bill, as House Republicans originally proposed it, would have imposed mandatory sentences and kept offenders from avoiding jail time by entering an alternative treatment program. As passed, the bill does make it tougher on these criminals but doesn't go nearly as far as the original bill intended. Next year I will work to make sure sex predators serve time for their crimes.

Wins for Employers and Families

Employers and people seeking jobs in the high tech industry will benefit from a bill we passed to continue offering incentives for **high technology businesses to locate and grow** in Washington. Since each high tech or biotech job creates as many as 3.4 additional jobs, this will have a big impact on our local economy.

And finally, we made it easier this year for employers to **challenge state rules and regulations** by allowing them to do so in Spokane County court, rather than having to travel across the state to Thurston County.

The Budget: prioritizing needs, living within our means

When the Legislature developed the state's 2003-05 budget last year, we filled a \$2.7 billion budget hole without raising taxes by **prioritizing how the state spends your money** and putting our most pressing needs first. This is called a "Priorities of Government" approach.

Unfortunately, this year's "mid-course" budget took us off that wise course by spending more and saving less. This will almost certainly leave us with another big budget deficit next year, when we develop the 2005-07 biennial budget. I strongly believe that the state should **live within its means**, just as families, employers and individuals must do. Next year I will strongly advocate getting back to the Priorities in Government approach and prioritize our needs based on the state's limited amount of revenue.



Rep. Ahern with Noel Wamsley, a student at Sacagawea, who paged for 2 weeks in Olympia.

2004 SESSION REVIEW

On the table for next year

'05

Regretfully, the Legislature left several important issues on the table – topics important to address next year. They include:

- **Liability reform.** This year House Republicans introduced a sweeping liability reform bill to prevent more doctors from leaving Washington or retiring, and to help employers and local governments now struggling to pay rising liability insurance costs. Unfortunately, the House majority party did not allow that bill — nor a similar Senate bill — to come before the House for a vote. Next year the Legislature simply *must* pass legislation to **control rising liability costs** that are forcing doctors out of practice, strangling employers and devastating local governments' budgets.
- **Meth makers.** This year the Legislature passed a bill making it a Class C felony for wholesalers to sell ephedrine products — often used to make meth — directly to consumers. Next year we should pass legislation that requires retail stores selling products that contain meth-making ingredients to sell them in smaller packages.
- **Criminal justice.** We should expand our drug courts and look seriously at requiring manual labor as part of the rehabilitation process.
- **Washington's business climate.** We must continue to improve our business climate, including ensuring a fairer workers' compensation system and limiting the rule-making authority of out-of-control state agencies and their employees.
- **Affordable insurance.** It's time to remove state-imposed mandates that are making insurance plans increasingly unaffordable for small employers.

Bad legislation: *Just say, "No!"*

Part of my job as your representative is to make good new laws. Another part is to stop bad ideas from becoming bad laws. One of the misdirected ideas that surfaced this year was a proposed ban on studded snow tires. Such action would seriously compromise the safety of those of us living east of the Cascades, where black ice and snowy hills are a way of life for many months each winter. Some have argued that studded snow tires cause more wear and tear on our roads. So, let's use better road building materials! One life saved — especially if that person is one you love — is worth the difference, don't you think? That's why I will continue to do all I can to help you keep your studded snow tires — and keep a bad idea from becoming a bad law.

Spokane higher ed, transportation projects funded

The 2004 legislative session was a very positive one for the people of the 6th District, including:

- \$31.6 million in funding for **Washington State University's Riverpoint Campus** to build a combination library, classroom, and administration building at the downtown campus.
- \$500,000 to begin major **improvements on Bigelow Gulch Road**. When the first phase of the North Spokane Corridor is completed along US 395 from Farwell Road to Francis Avenue, traffic will funnel onto Bigelow Gulch road, doubling the number of cars to 32,000 a day. The new funding will help ease that traffic bottleneck and increase drivers' safety.



Rep. JOHN AHERN • 2004 SESSION REVIEW

What you'll find in this year's primary election

Last year the Supreme Court declared Washington's blanket primary election unconstitutional, leaving the Legislature to choose a new primary. Our main goals were **protecting voters' choice, privacy and independence**. The plan that passed advanced the top two primary vote getters to the general election – regardless of party. The bill also had back-up language for a second choice, a **Montana-style primary**, where voters don't have to register with a party and can confidentially pick a single party's ballot. The Governor vetoed the "Top Two" idea and chose the Montana-style primary for Washington.



District office reopened

Now that the 2004 legislative session is over, I've reopened the local office here in the 6th District. Charlotte Karling, my Legislative Assistant, and I are available here to help you. I invite you to drop by the Cornerstone Building, **320 W. Spofford, Spokane** or give us a call at **(509) 568-3077**. You can also reach me by e-mail at **Ahern_jo@leg.wa.gov**, or by calling the Legislative Hotline at **1-800-562-6000**.

I encourage you to contact me if you have any questions, if you want to talk about legislative issues or need help working with a state agency. ***My door is always open.***



P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

JOHN AHERN
State Representative

2004 SESSION REVIEW

News & Views

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing